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Generalized views of the role of the elementary school in a democratic society and of the uniqueness of each student have implications for policy in improving elementary education. Owing to the youth of its clientele, the elementary school has an intense impact. No school so greatly affects so many Americans. It is a democratic institution instructive in the ways of democracy and knowledges and skills required for equal opportunity. Learning is an individual process. Each child's unique, personal characteristics determine whether and how he can profit from a given learning situation. The assigning of homework and having a pupil repeat a year should be adaptions to individual pupils. Reading should be taught in kindergarten, but only to those pupils who are ready for it. (Other issues in elementary education discussed are foreign language instruction in elementary schools, departmentalization, giftedness, school facilities, and the teacher shortage.) (DL)

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Contemporary Issues in Elementary Education

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Contemporary Issues in Elementary Education

INCREASINGLY aware that the nation's welfare depends on the development of individual talents, Americans are taking a renewed interest in their schools. Extensive general and specialized knowledge and skills are at a premium, and the high school and college, which most directly contribute to them, have been at the center of public attention. The public concern for the high school and college has been coupled with some demands that schools require more of each pupil and that more be taught in more rigorous fashion.

This pressure has spread to the elementary school, which is today being asked to introduce some of its traditional subjects earlier, to concern itself with other subjects that have generally been taught mainly in high school, and to increase its use of specialized teachers. In effect, the elementary school is being urged to strive for dignity by likening itself to a high school. Thus the special importance of the elementary school as the foundation of further learning in both high school and college may be recognized inadequately or not at all.

Schools, by their very relationship with society, are always in need of change. But each level of education has distinctive characteristics and a distinctive role. Changes which disregard this fact may do more harm than good. This report seeks to identify the unique characteristics of elementary education and to illustrate their bearing on current practices and proposed changes.

THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN TRANSITION

The American society has changed vastly in this century in respect to population, technology, forms of power, and social organization. This has meant changes in the life of the family, the community, and the nation. It has meant a striking expansion in the citizen's need for knowledge of his world and of himself. Matters which were once the concern of a few or irrelevant to practical affairs have acquired unexpected universality and immediacy. For example, a knowledge of living conditions in other lands is now directly relevant to the decisions faced by each American voter. Even the moon, once the province of the astronomer or poet, has become a subject of national and international policy. The dimensions of relevance have expanded, and with them the demands on the school.

Just as the need to know and to understand has expanded, so have the means of acquiring knowledge and understanding. Mass communication has become so pervasive in the culture that today's child enters school with a variety of experiences and information unimagined by beginning pupils a generation ago. This change, too, presents the school with important problems and opportunities.

The elementary school, here defined as a school extending through the sixth grade, has responded to the 20th century with many changes. The content of instruction has expanded. Teaching procedures have shifted from heavy reliance on rote learning of printed materials to a wider variety of approaches. Instructional materials such as textbooks and supplementary reading materials, films, sound recordings, maps, and models have increased dramatically in variety, quality, and availability. Elementary-school buildings have been better designed for serving children. School services have been extended. The kindergarten, merely an experiment a century ago, has been increasingly accepted as a part of elementary education.

Perhaps most important, the preparation period of the elementary-school teacher has steadily increased. At the turn of the century, the typical elementary-school teacher had less than a high-school education. Today 39 states require that all elementary-school teachers be college graduates, and three-quarters of all present elementary-school teachers have college degrees. Their preparation today includes more general education than was the case a century ago, and much more knowledge about children, about learning, and about the school as a social institution.

The elementary school continues to change today, for it must strive incessantly to take account of social change and to improve its effectiveness. In changing, it must pay due regard to the role which it alone can play, and to the growing body of knowledge about children and about learning.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The unique importance of the elementary school lies in the universality and intensity of its influence. Virtually all Americans attend this school, and at a period when the school can make a larger difference in their lives than at any later time.

Equal Opportunity and National Unity

Universal education has been most nearly achieved at the elementary-school level. Of all educational institutions, the elementary school reaches the greatest number of Americans for the longest time. It is therefore a corner stone of the American promise of equal opportunity. It represents the nation's most widespread provision for learning the ways of democracy. Here children of many backgrounds, interests, and abilities learn together and take basic steps toward useful and rewarding citizenship. The elementary school is therefore a powerful instrument of unity for a diverse people.

Knowledge and Skills Basic to Further Learning

The intense impact of the elementary school is due to the youth of its clientele. The time that young children spend in school represents a considerable share of all the time they have experienced. Each childhood experience seems large because the child's background is small. The elementary school thus has a unique opportunity to influence the course of a child's further schooling and of his intellectual life in general. Here his knowledge and understanding of himself and his world, his habits in the use of his intellect, his skill in language and numbers, his ability to seek out further learning, and his sense of the aesthetic, receive their first formal impetus.

Attitudes toward Learning

The course of a pupil's further learning is determined also by the attitudes toward development of his mental abilities that he carries away from school. Most children bring to school an invaluable learning resource—their native curiosity. This is the seed from which a lifetime of devotion to intellectual development can grow. In the elementary-school years its growth is either stunted or nourished. The child may develop confidence that he can learn, or he may conclude, perhaps irrevocably, that he cannot. He may come to cherish learning as a rewarding adventure, and admire man's quest for knowledge, or he may come to view learning as a burden to be feared and avoided.

Attitudes toward Self and Society

A child's elementary-school experience is usually his first prolonged experience outside his immediate family. This new setting will have marked influence on his social attitudes. Tolerance, sympathy, and responsibility are strengthened or inhibited by the elementary-school experience. In this school, too, the child's attitudes toward himself may be shaped. He may come to see himself as valued and needed by an understanding society,

or as friendless and inadequate in an incomprehensible or hostile world.

So great a potential for influencing the child and society endows the elementary school with unique opportunities—and awesome responsibilities.

THE CONTENT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

All later learning builds on the work of the elementary school.

The skills which mark the civilized person and provide the basis for all further intellectual growth are the special concern of any good elementary school: reading, writing, speaking, listening, observing, reasoning, computing, discovering, and creating.

Here, too, the pupil receives his first systematic look into the social studies, science, literature, music, and art. Through them he begins to acquire information, ideas, skills, sensitivity, and understanding about himself and his environment. He is introduced to the variety of ways of living and to the diversity of man's institutions, learns how some of them developed, and acquires a basis for tolerance and sympathy for those whose ways differ from his own.

He begins to develop awareness of the vastness of the information that is available to him, and of its organization and accessibility. He begins to learn how to use books, libraries, and other sources of information. He begins to develop skills in evaluating and using information, thus laying the groundwork for more advanced and disciplined study. He begins to distinguish fact from opinion, and to report accurately what he has seen, heard, or read. He begins to identify and qualify generalizations and to develop skill in moving from the data he collects to generalizations which these data may support. Through these learnings he is introduced to the ideal of the independent and inquiring mind and to the discipline it demands.

He develops his capacity to work with other children and with adults, to get along in a world in which cooperation and competition are accepted and necessary forms of social action. He develops the habits of responsibility and the awareness of the needs and rights of others which will help him to become a contributing member of his society. He works with groups of various sizes and characteristics. In some he is leader, in others, follower. He has the opportunity to excel in some things and to admire other children for performances superior to his. He sees in his studies and in action the central value of the American society—respect for the individual.

He acquires many essentials of safety and personal health, develops his physical coordination, and learns to care for tools and personal possessions.

In furnishing this complex program to all children, the elementary school must rely on what is known about children and how they learn.

REALITIES OF LEARNING

Research in human development and the experience of many people who work with children have thrown considerable light on children and their learning.

Each Child Is Unique

Many interrelated factors in a child's life, such as inherited potential, physical condition, available energy, cultural background, and quality and extent of experience, combine to make him different from all others. That each child is unique hardly needs demonstration. That this uniqueness deeply affects learning, however, is not always taken into account.

Learning Is an Individual Process

Each person does his own learning. That is why his unique, personal characteristics are vital to the school. They determine

whether and how he can profit from a given learning situation. Learning motivated solely by external authority is unlikely to be meaningful or durable. A child must have the physical maturity and the understanding which make the new learning possible, and the interest which stimulates the effort. The physical maturity must come on its own, but the teacher can promote the understanding and the interest. In homes where reading plays little role in the life of the adults, it is likely to appear of minor significance to the children; but a skillful teacher can bring meaning to the effort of acquiring the skill. The realization of what reading is and its role in life is the beginning of learning to read, and the teacher can contribute to that realization. In short, a child's readiness and motivation are crucial because learning is an inner, personal process.

Physical Condition Affects Learning

Children's alertness, readiness, interests, self-confidence, and hence success in learning, are influenced by their health, energy output, eyesight, hearing, and physical skills and development. These conditions vary from child to child and some of them from day to day. For example, although all children proceed through the same general pattern of development, each grows up at his own rate. Children of the same age may vary greatly in physical maturity. This is one reason why the performance of slow beginners sometimes improves in later grades, and why all children in a grade should not be expected to respond in the same way to the same experiences or to meet a single standard of achievement.

Cultural Background Affects Learning

The child brings to the school many of the beliefs, attitudes, and types of behavior which he has learned from his family and friends. This helps to explain the wide differences within any elementary classroom in interests, behavior, and perception, and

consequently in readiness and ability to learn in different areas. It also means that a child's dress, speech, race, national background, religion, morality, behavior, and goals may markedly differ from those of the teacher. If this child nonetheless senses that the teacher and the school value him, his self-confidence is not threatened and he can react favorably to the influence of the teacher. But if the child is held in low esteem, his attitude toward school and his motivation to learn are likely to suffer. The school in the latter instance has chosen, in effect, to punish the child for the environment into which he was born. Such conflict between home and school will cost the school much of its influence on the child.

Self-Concept Affects Learning

To learn well the things a school attempts to communicate, a child must feel a sense of personal worth. This sense derives not only from the home, but also from the school. It requires a feeling of adequacy to cope with the school's expectations. If the child has confidence in his ability to learn, his power to learn is released; he can face occasional failure and try again. If he believes that he cannot learn, the belief may become the fact. To maintain self-confidence, the child must experience more success than failure. He must achieve recognition and approval. Constant rebuff, frustration, or failure, particularly in situations over which he has no control, are likely to result in lowered expectations of himself, not in improved learning. Good education is challenging, not frightening. It produces satisfaction in achievement, an accompanying sense of competence and independence, and approval of others. It thus stimulates further learning, for the pupil's expectations of himself continue to grow.

Mental State Affects Learning

The child who learns well at school is one who can devote his attention to learning. He can best do so in an atmosphere characterized both in school and out by friendliness, mutual sup-

port, and encouragement. Difficulties arise when a child is so deeply absorbed in persistent or passing problems of his life that classroom activities lack interest or meaning. In such cases the child may become defiant, may blame or belittle others, or may be apathetic. Excessive pressure will usually intensify the problem. When, on the other hand, the child is helped to cope with his personal difficulties he often makes remarkable gains in learning.

Stability of Environment Affects Learning

Stability in the early school years is essential to the integration of the many new experiences provided in the school and society. It is important that the young child spend a considerable period at school with a person whom he knows and trusts and who knows and respects him. In the early years a child develops a sense of the world as basically orderly or as basically unpredictable, a sense of ability to deal with his environment or a sense of helplessness, a sense of self-reliance or of dependency. The stimulating teacher uses many means of arousing interest and attention, but too frequent changes of people, place, or atmosphere are unsettling, particularly in a society where many stimuli compete for the child's attention.

Learning Is an Active Process

The young child learns about the world and how to deal with it by doing things in it and to it. Elementary-school children are characteristically active, curious, desirous of competence and greater independence. The curriculum should take advantage of these traits, providing children with opportunities to be physically active, to express their interests and curiosity, to share and communicate, to manipulate and construct, and to express themselves in speaking, writing, art, music, and drama. The experiences which have the greatest impact are those in which the pupil becomes deeply involved and in which he can sense his progress.

Learning Is Many-Sided in Results

Children do not necessarily learn what the teacher intends. As a child acquaints himself with a fact, a skill, or an idea, he may at the same time modify his goals, his values, or his attitudes. When he is working at a problem in arithmetic, he may at the same time be learning to enjoy or dislike arithmetic, to see applications of arithmetic around him or to look upon it as a meaningless exercise, to cheat or be honest, to be neat or untidy, to be accurate or careless, to feel self-confident or inadequate, to admire or dislike a fellow pupil whose success is praised.

Learning thus depends on many factors. Not all can be influenced by the school or by the teacher. Some fundamental factors, such as the cultural background and the child's own constitution, are largely outside the school's control. However important the role of the school in the child's education, the home and community, the mass media, and the society-at-large inevitably play a great part in determining what the child learns and what he thinks about learning.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

There is widespread belief that American education must be more effective. Growing out of this sentiment are pressures for change in educational institutions. It is right and inevitable that these pressures have been directed in part at the elementary school. In fact, the unique potential of that school would justify greater public attention. Today a number of issues face those who make policy for elementary schools. The following paragraphs treat some of them.

Introduction of Reading

No skill in education is more fundamental than reading. It is to be expected, therefore, that all concerned would urge early acquisition of that skill. The issue thus arises as to when organized instruction in reading should begin. Because systematic

teaching of reading is usually started in the first grade, the issue may be stated as follows: *What should be done with reading in the kindergarten?*

Research on the teaching of reading shows that some children gain from an early start. Others who start early, however, do not in the long run progress so rapidly in reading or develop so great a liking for it as do children who begin reading later. Still others are not ready to learn to read even in the first grade. Thus, it is not wise policy to teach *all* kindergarten children to read.

The claim of reading to a place in the kindergarten must be assessed in terms of the individual child's ability to profit from reading instruction. It must be assessed also in terms of the relationship of reading to the role which the kindergarten is peculiarly adapted to fill.

The kindergarten is designed for five-year-olds. Its central purpose is to help the young child adapt to school, to find his place in school life and in the group of which he is a member, and to promote readiness for learning in various areas. It helps him gain independence and social maturity. It works through activities appropriate to a school setting, but adapted to the immaturity and restlessness of the young child.

If the kindergarten function is not accomplished before the first grade, the necessary adjustments must be sought in the first grade, taking the teacher's time and attention from other matters, including the teaching of reading.

The kindergarten can and should teach reading when such teaching contributes to the goals of the kindergarten. And development of the desire and readiness to read in all children is a proper function of the kindergarten, for this contributes to its central purpose.

Reading or interest in reading is already a part of the lives of many five-year-olds. These children should be encouraged to develop and deepen their reading skill. Their very presence in the kindergarten may produce in other children the desire to

read, and desire to read is a good beginning for acquiring the skill. But the teaching of reading to children who are neither physically nor emotionally ready for it may create frustration which will inhibit later learning.

Thus the problem of timing the introduction of reading instruction is not that of setting uniform policy for all pupils. It is rather a matter of serving pupils on an individual basis.

Foreign Languages

The growth of America's international activities and responsibilities, both public and private, has led to increasing interest in the development of the linguistic abilities of Americans. Coupled with this interest is the widespread belief that foreign languages are learned more easily before adolescence than afterwards. As a result, pressure has developed to begin the teaching of foreign languages earlier, thus raising the issue: *Should foreign languages be taught in the elementary school?*

The elementary-school years have considerable potential for shaping attitudes toward other peoples. Experiences with other cultures, including their languages, are therefore a valid part of the elementary program. Introduction to foreign tongues through songs, games, recordings, television programs, or visits of foreigners can help children learn that man has developed many ways of living and of communicating and can arouse interest in the varieties of cultures and languages around the world.

However, if the goal of the foreign-language program is to promote mastery of the language, organized and intensive instruction becomes necessary. To master a foreign language requires considerable concentration of time and energy. It is not easy at any time of life. It also requires qualified teachers and special materials. If the school cannot furnish the time, the teachers, and the materials, it cannot conduct a successful foreign-language teaching program. If it can furnish them, it must still assess other potential uses of the same time and funds.

Skill in the English language is more important for American pupils than skill in a foreign language. Mathematics, the social studies, and science are also areas of prime importance to the elementary school. In the light of these obligations, the school must consider whether it is wise to allot a significant share of its time and money to a foreign-language program. A foreign-language program is not justified in the elementary school if it encroaches on pupil progress in the areas of the school's basic responsibilities.

An issue also to be faced is that of making a choice among the many languages, a choice likely to be arbitrary where there is no apparent need for a specific second language. In most monolingual communities, no single second language can be considered a necessary common learning for all pupils at the elementary level of education.

For some children, however, specialized experiences in foreign language can be just as important a part of their education as is specialized experience in social studies or science for others. The judgment must be made in each case in terms of the child's progress, background, and interests, so as to assure that he will move forward at his own best pace and develop his own special talents.

Continuity is also a necessity. School instruction aimed at learning a language can give results appropriate to the effort expended only if continued over a period of years. A program designed to teach a given language is not justified if it cannot be continuous.

Attention must be paid also to the problem of motivation. Where pupils are highly motivated to learn a foreign langauge, there may be value in intensive language study. In other communities, such as those where a second language is not commonly spoken or where pupils do not see a valid reason to learn a language, the problem of motivating children for systematic and continued study of a foreign language is a very real one. Little

durable good and considerable distaste for the subject may result from an experience in which the children find little personal meaning.

A program with the limited goal of promoting an awareness of other cultures and languages and an interest in learning more about them is appropriate in the elementary curriculum. But several conditions must be met before a program designed to teach the language itself should be introduced. The community must be willing to allocate, on a long-term basis, the staff and materials required for language study, and must find a satisfactory basis for choice of language. The school must determine which children, on the basis of their progress in other areas and their motivation for language study, stand to gain from a systematic and continued program. This means that such a program, while suitable for some pupils, should not include all the children in most elementary schools.

Departmentalization

The elementary-school curriculum has traditionally stressed the skills and attitudes basic to learning, as well as that knowledge which has itself been considered basic. As the relationship between knowledge and progress has become increasingly apparent, pressure has increased to stress further the knowledge aspect of the curriculum by introducing more content from academic fields, such as the natural sciences, social studies, and mathematics. In high schools and colleges, teachers are better able to specialize in specific fields because the curriculum is organized in departments which reflect the disciplines of learning. In recognition of this practice, the pressure to increase the emphasis on similar disciplines in the elementary school has given rise to the issue: *Should the elementary school be departmentalized?*

Elementary-school teachers, particularly those who teach the upper-elementary years, need substantial knowledge of the subjects which they teach, and departmentalization therefore appears

attractive. But they also need substantial knowledge of each pupil. Under departmentalization the teacher sees more children, each for a limited time and in relation to a specific subject, so he is likely to know less about a child than he would if he saw him for longer and in more varied situations.

In the past, fully departmentalized types of organization have been tried in some elementary schools; but research and experience have generally caused these experiments to be discarded. Research and experimentation continue with forms of organization lying between the completely departmentalized and the completely nondepartmentalized. Many of these forms appear to offer significant advantages.

Use of special teachers, team teaching, and teacher aides, for example, can be of benefit as long as they do not hamper the close contact of the classroom teacher and pupil. Pupils require stable personal relationships, but this need not mean that a child must remain in the same classroom all day with one teacher. Special teachers may enter and children may leave. The essential condition is that some one teacher have major responsibility for the curriculum and guidance of a group of pupils.

Homework

The desire to improve academic accomplishments in the elementary school has led to a demand for more and harder homework at earlier levels. Because learning is produced by a pupil's own efforts, it seems reasonable to demand more effort of the pupil in order to achieve more learning. Thus the issue is: *What kind of homework should be assigned in elementary school?*

Homework, in its usual meaning, refers to work which the child is assigned to do on his own time as an extension of his classroom work. It is distinct from extra-curricular activities or intellectual pursuits undertaken voluntarily.

Homework which ties the child's interests and energy to developing intellectual skills or to gaining insight can be valuable.

A visit to a local historical museum can illuminate the study of some aspect of local history. The skills required to write a letter or draft a theme will serve children throughout their lives. But to assure that an assignment will benefit pupils, it must be adapted to each of them.

It must be adapted first of all to the home environment. Homework usually implies a home. But some pupils live in circumstances which do not merit that name. For them, little good can come from assignments which cannot be satisfactorily completed without a home library, seclusion, time for uninterrupted study, or parent interest and cooperation.

Teachers must be aware also of the total pattern of a child's day in order to decide how much of that day the school is justified in appropriating. A mere increase in work will not necessarily produce an increase in learning. This assumption is valid only within limits and is not valid at all if the school's demand for greater effort merely diminishes the child's desire to learn. And homework is of little value if it denies the child other valuable learning experiences. A significant part of the education of many children is provided by the home. Children should have time to contribute to and enjoy home life. Children also need time for rest, relaxation, and play. All these considerations should be balanced against the school's claim for a larger share of the child's energy and attention.

Pupil Placement and Progress

The wide variation in growth rate among pupils and in their academic accomplishments inevitably raises the question of how they should be grouped and what recognition should be given to their progress. The question is frequently put in this form: *Should the school accelerate or hold back pupils in terms of their ability to meet a uniform standard of achievement?*

Obviously this question should be evaluated in terms of the effect of such a policy on the children concerned. Will accelera-

tion or nonpromotion help or harm the children to whom it applies?

Acceleration of rapid learners can be good for them. Effective teaching of such children places heavy demands on the teacher. Where other demands limit the teacher's time and energy, the gifted learners may not be challenged, and boredom and underachievement may result. In these circumstances, it may be wise to place these children in a more advanced class. There, at least, they will be in closer company intellectually and may be better challenged.

Acceleration, however, though it may provide an acceptable answer for rapid learners, may not be the *best* answer. A child with a high IQ may have the intellectual potential of another child several years older, but he has not had the equivalent experience of life. How far he has developed physically and socially also has bearing upon the kind of curriculum he should have and the companionship from which he will most profit. It may well be that his development as a considerate, responsible citizen will be better served by making special provisions for him in a classroom with children his own age, so that he can learn from others and contribute to the learning of others.

Acceleration can also be seriously damaging. If, for example, it puts too much pressure on the child or destroys the contact between him and his friends, it may result in increased psychological problems rather than increased learning. Thus a general policy of accelerating all pupils who perform above a given standard is not likely to be wise. The wise policy is to make it possible to accelerate students in those cases in which persons who know the child—parents, teacher, and principal—judge that it will be good for him.

Sometimes it is desirable for a pupil to repeat a year. These cases, however, are rare. Among children who are held back, many set lower goals for themselves, try less hard, achieve no better, and become behavior problems. They tend to accept the stigma of inferiority and to develop attitudes consistent with it.

This damage does not result in compensating gains for other pupils or for the child concerned. Where nonpromotion is adopted, the range of abilities in the promoted class remains great, and pupil achievement continues to vary widely. The problem is one of grouping children so as to offer the best possible learning situation for each child and to permit children to progress continuously rather than by inflexible annual promotion.

Giftedness

Related to the problem of pupil placement is the problem of recognizing and developing unusual talents in children. These talents are of many types. They include abstract reasoning ability, unusual memory, artistic and poetic creativity, inventiveness, and physical skills. The area of giftedness that receives the largest public attention today is academic talent, usually measured by a broad intelligence test. The issue is usually stated: *Should the elementary school establish a special program for academically talented children?*

A first concern is the problem of identifying such children. Potential to do college-level intellectual work is often cited as a criterion of academic talent, and this potential is usually identified by intelligence or aptitude test scores. These tests usually measure capacity to learn, but they also occasionally fail to identify this ability. And no test yet devised can identify the late bloomer who throughout his school program appears to lack talent, yet performs outstandingly in his adult life.

A second concern lies in determining the share of the school's resources to be used for a limited group of children. The elementary school has responsibility for providing the best possible education for every child. It cannot accept the propositon that the best education should be reserved for the most able. All children have some gifts, the gifts of all are needed for a strong society, and the democratic ideal requires that all children be accorded equal respect.

The school's obligation for equal respect and concern, however, is not an obligation for identical treatment. It does require that a teacher who has a gifted child in his class should be aware of this fact and should devise means to develop his unique abilities. In a previous publication, *Education of the Gifted* (1951), this Commission set forth principles which should govern special provisions for the education of these children.

Special programs and policies for the academically talented can be desirable. But some children show themselves early to be very advanced in the rate and nature of their learning, even beyond the academically talented. They are so unique in these aspects and so few in number that no preconceived plans will suffice. Schools can hardly be expected to make general policies or establish general programs for talents that occur in only three or four children in ten thousand. Challenging and guiding such children is a cooperative responsibility of the school and the home. Excellent teachers should be provided to guide them, together with a home and school environment in which many learning materials are available and in which they can learn without hindrance. Whether they should be accelerated, though, and just what special provisions should be made for them, should be decided case by case.

Facilities

Although the elementary school's program and staff are the main elements of public interest, the facilities in which they operate should not be overlooked. Because school facilities are costly, questions arise: *What facilities are needed? Can facilities be used more effectively?*

The facilities needed in an elementary school are governed by its program. The heart of the program is classroom activity. This means not just a sufficient number of rooms for classes, but also rooms that are properly planned and equipped so that learning is enhanced. Classrooms should be spacious and well-lighted and equipped with movable furniture and the instructional and

storage facilities needed for effective teaching, including a classroom collection of frequently used materials. Beyond classrooms, elementary schools need many other types of facilities.

An elementary school needs a library available to pupils individually, in groups, and in classes. It needs also a carefully chosen and catalogued supply of audio-visual and other instructional materials for classroom use. The library should be a place of discovery for the pupil where he learns to exercise his own judgment in the selection and use of a wide variety of reading materials, develops the habit of independent study, and broadens his own cultural horizons. It is an essential in a modern elementary school.

In addition, elementary schools should have facilities for play and for meetings of the pupils. Many schools have devised combinations of facilities which will meet a variety of needs, such as "multipurpose" rooms which are used for eating, meeting, play, and recreation.

There should also be spaces for administrative offices and for special purposes such as conferences with parents and teachers, faculty meetings, pupil counselling, and in-service training programs. Space should be available for health services, for special speech and reading work, and for testing of vision and hearing. The school should also have facilities for using audio-visual materials and television, both closed-circuit and broadcast.

The question of improving the utilization of school facilities depends for its solution on the kind of community involved and the willingness of parents and other citizens to accept educational programs of various levels of quality. The usual elementary school is used for not more than eight hours per day. If citizens want children to go to school in two or three shifts, utilization of facilities could be greatly increased. Similarly, savings can be effected by building large schools; but this requires the children to go greater distances to reach the school. Persons who can afford good schools are not likely to tolerate such conditions.

Staff Services

In providing a good elementary-school program, the role of the teacher is, of course, central; but many functions need to be performed in the school which either cannot be performed by teachers or, if they are, intrude upon the time which the teachers can devote to children. Consequently, the question arises: *What services should be supplied in support of the teachers?*

The first essential supplementary service is leadership. There should be an able and professionally prepared principal in every elementary school. The principal is the leader of the school in its service to children and in its contact with the community. In most situations the personality of the principal greatly influences the spirit and morale of the school and the relationships of the school with parents and community.

The principal is also the leader of the staff and of the instructional program. A good program is one which can be adapted to fit individual pupils. Working with his staff, the principal takes active responsibility for achieving this flexibility and seeing to it that each child's program is planned and replanned in the light of new information about him.

The effective principal also discovers and utilizes the special talents of each member of the staff, so that teachers learn from and assist one another. Thus the curriculum is improved and children are offered opportunities for experiences resulting from the unique talents of each teacher.

When difficult problems of pupil adjustment threaten to take an undue share of the teacher's time and effort, it is the able principal who acts to maintain the effectiveness of the teacher in the classroom. He mobilizes the school's resources to help the teacher, advising the teacher and the pupil, conferring with parents, and calling in specialized personnel as needed. In this way, the principal makes it possible for the teacher to devote attention to all the children in the class.

Specialized services should be available to deal with reading difficulties, emotional disturbances, or other problems which re-

quire expert attention. These services do not substitute for the central role of the teacher in the guidance function. The guidance of most pupils in the elementary school is best performed by the teacher who knows them best. But in support of this function the school should have access to experts in social work and psychological services, who can give support in difficult cases. Similarly, specialists in child development, in curriculum, and in instructional and testing materials should be available to assist teachers. Such a staff helps teachers to keep abreast of developments in subject-matter fields and to decide when other specialists are needed and how they can best be used.

There should also be a full-time and professionally trained librarian in charge of the elementary-school library. When such a person is not available, services to children and to the staff are diminished. Inexperienced or part-time personnel cannot adequately help children to locate appropriate materials. A collection of teaching material tends to deteriorate if it is not tended. A library without a librarian soon ceases to be a library.

There should also be clerical services available to keep records and assist in school management. These services are needed to enable both the principal and the teachers to devote the major share of their attention to professional matters.

Staff Size

The cost of operating a school is primarily the cost of employing the professional staff. Professional salaries alone usually account for about two-thirds of all operating costs. Thus one basic matter of school policy is the size of the professional staff. The question therefore arises: *How large should the staff of an elementary school be?* If it were possible to define the best size of an elementary-school class, it would be a simple matter to calculate desirable staff size. The research, however, does not indicate clearly what is a desirable class size.

While no precise ideal class size can be established, it is clear that as the number of children increases, the possibility of individualizing instruction diminishes.

Pending a time when research yields more conclusive answers, the experience of competent persons who work in and know elementary schools should be heeded. Such persons seem to agree that the opportunity to adapt programs to individuals diminishes rapidly as classes exceed 25 pupils. The ability to provide needed services to pupils, of course, varies with the needs of those pupils and the ability of the teacher to perceive those needs. Thus classes of 25 might be organized in which no teacher could possibly serve all the children because of great variations in needs or the inclusion of pupils with particularly difficult problems of personal adjustment. These problems require outside services. Thus the key concept is staff size rather than class size. In a previous publication, *An Essay on Quality in Public Education* (1959), the Educational Policies Commission analyzed the problem of staff size as follows:

> In any school system there should be enough competent professionals to ensure that every pupil receives needed attention. Where this standard is met, classes are of various sizes, depending on subjects taught and the characteristics of the student body. If the school program is to provide wide opportunities, and if the supplementary services of guidance counselors, librarians, coordinators, and administrators are to be available, there is obviously some minimum staff size below which needed professional services cannot be supplied. Experience in good school systems indicates that this minimum is about fifty professionals per thousand pupils. These professionals might be distributed in many ways. In some cases as many as forty might be classroom teachers. If somewhat larger classes are feasible, thereby decreasing the number of teachers, the individual assistance each pupil needs for maximum achievement can be provided only if the number of supplementary professional personnel rises to compensate. If fewer than fifty professionals are available per thousand pupils, some of the elements of a program of high quality are likely to be slighted.

The Teacher

The program of the elementary school should enable each child to advance from experience to experience at his own best

pace. The individual teacher has the central responsibility for bringing this about. Thus the critical question in the improvement of elementary education is: *How can enough good elementary-school teachers be found?*

If the standard cited above were met, American public elementary schools would have more than one million teachers; yet the present elementary-school teacher population is only 837,000. Further, some 68,000 of them now hold credentials which are less than satisfactory in the states where they teach. Growing enrollments and replacement of those who leave teaching require today some 80,000 new elementary-school teachers annually. Yet the colleges and institutions which prepare teachers for elementary schools graduated only about 50,000 in 1960. Nowhere in education is the teacher shortage more acute than in elementary education, and nowhere is the teaching influence greater. Staffing the elementary schools of the country with enough able teachers is a first order of business. No issue in elementary education is of greater importance.

The teacher's role in elementary education, as it is thought of today, is difficult to fill. Individualization of instruction presupposes a knowledge of each child. The teacher must value all children and the pupils must sense the teacher's regard for them. The teacher is principally responsible for the child's progress in acquiring academic skills and knowledge and simultaneously for his progress in developing the desire to learn, his growth toward effective citizenship, and his increasing sensitivity to other persons.

Such teaching is extremely demanding. It requires persons of exceptional qualifications of character and academic and professional preparation. They must be broadly educated, as well as especially versed in child development and the principles and materials of learning. And with it all they must be sympathetic to the needs of children, emotionally constituted to deal with them positively, and flexible enough to adjust to the changing needs and stages of child development and the emerging directions of the society. They must be observant and professionally dis-

ciplined enough to evaluate and keep effective records of the achievements and progress of each child, and they must possess the professional motivation to make teaching a lifetime career.

CONCLUSION

Those who make the policies which shape the elementary school bear grave responsibilities. No school affects so greatly the lives of so many Americans. Its unique potentials demand that it be treated with the greatest respect. Proposals to change this school must be carefully weighed, recognizing that changes at this level are likely to bear greater consequences for the lives of pupils than equivalent changes at other levels.

A proposal for change, however, cannot be judged solely on its own merits. The school board must assess a proposed new program against the contribution to school improvement which a given effort and funds could make if spent in a different way. The same expenditure could, for example, make possible a reduction in class size or provision of special assistance, or a rise in salary levels which might support recruitment of better teachers. Finding a just balance among competing demands is obviously a local decision. Broad and careful planning is required to assure excellence and balance in the total program.

Many of the contemporary issues in elementary education will persist. New issues will arise. One element, however, is common to all issues in elementary education. This is the central role of the teacher. The teacher, more than any other factor, determines the quality of elementary education. There is no substitute for a person of high integrity, sensitive to children and professionally trained, to perform the teaching function. As a consequence, the citizen who would seriously devote himself to the improvement of elementary education in the United States, should take as his first objective the recruitment, education, and retention in the profession of qualified teachers.

A Note on Research

A century of educational research has yielded a large number of studies which throw light on the policy questions here discussed. The best single summation of these studies is the *Encyclopedia of Educational Research,* a project of the American Educational Research Association (NEA), and published decennially by the Macmillan Company, New York, N. Y.

Many of the studies summarized are directly pertinent to this report. There are four major articles on elementary education (pp. 412-448 in the 1960 edition), treating its development, organization and administration, programs, and pupils. The reader interested in further study of the general view of the elementary school here developed on pp. 1-10 is referred to these articles.

With reference to the specific policy issues discussed here on pp. 10-25, the *Encyclopedia* can be used as follows:

READING: The *Encyclopedia* offers a major article entitled *Reading.* The part which refers to time of beginning to teach reading starts on p. 1115. Also pertinent are the article on *Early Childhood Education,* which contains material on the kindergarten, and the article on *Readiness.*

FOREIGN LANGUAGES: The article on *Modern Languages* includes a section, beginning on p. 870, specifically devoted to teaching of foreign languages in the elementary school. Also pertinent is the article on *Intercultural Education.*

DEPARTMENTALIZATION: The issue is treated in the article *Elementary Education—Organization and Administration,* beginning on p. 426. Also pertinent is the article on *Classroom Organization,* which treats the matter in a discussion of Horizontal Organization.

HOMEWORK: An article on *Homework and Guided Study* reviews the research on this subject. Also pertinent is the discussion of Family Influence on School Adjustment on p. 514 in the article on *Family.*

PUPIL PLACEMENT AND PROGRESS: This area is treated in many parts of the *Encyclopedia.* There is a major article on *Acceleration and Retarded Progress.* In addition, the article on *Elementary Education—Program,* contains a discussion of Promoting and Reporting Practices, beginning on p. 438, and the article on *Elementary Education—Organization and Administration* offers a discussion of Grouping and Promotion of Students, beginning on p. 427. The article on *Individual and Sex Differences* dis-

cusses the value of uniform standards of achievement in a section on Educational Practice in Relation to Individual Differences on p. 681.

GIFTEDNESS AND CREATIVITY: This matter is closely related to the issue of pupil placement and progress, and the materials just cited are all pertinent. In addition, there is a major article on *Gifted Children.*

FACILITIES: A major article entitled *Plant and Equipment* discusses the need for facilities of all types. Other pertinent articles are those on *Audio-Visual Communication, School Libraries,* and *Health Services—Elementary and Secondary.*

STAFF SERVICES: The *Encyclopedia* does not discuss the specific question of staff composition. It does, however, discuss the need for various specialties in addition to teaching and the qualifications for such specialties. Especially pertinent are (1) the section on The Elementary Administrator on p. 422 of the article on *Elementary Education—Organization and Administration;* (2) the article on *Student Personnel Work—Elementary and Secondary;* (3) the article on *Supervision;* and (4) the article on *School Libraries.*

STAFF SIZE: The article on *Teaching Load* contains specific treatment of the issue of class size, which is also referred to in a section starting on p. 224 in the article on *Classroom Organization* and in a section starting on p. 427 in the article on *Elementary Education—Organization and Administration.*

THE TEACHER: A large number of articles refer to the teacher. One deals with *Staff—Characteristics;* two treat *Teacher Effectiveness,* covering Criteria and Prediction of Effectiveness; and four deal with *Teacher Education,* ranging over Development, Organization and Administration, Programs, and Student Teaching and Internship.